 Controlling Condensation and Mould

1. **What is condensation?**

There is always moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. If air gets cold, it cannot hold all the moisture produced by everyday activities and some of this moisture appears as tiny droplets of water, most noticeably on windows on a cold morning. This is condensation. It can also be seen on mirrors when you have a bath or shower and on cold surfaces such as tiles or cold walls.

Condensation occurs in cold weather, even when the weather is dry. It doesn’t leave a ‘tidemark’ round its edges on walls. If there is a ‘tidemark’ this dampness might have another cause, such as water leaking into your home from a plumbing fault, loose roof tiles or rising damp.

**Condensation is the only type of “damp” to cause black mould.**

**Look for condensation in your home**. It can appear in or near windows, in the corners and in or behind wardrobes and cupboards. Condensation forms on cold surfaces and places where there is little movement of air.

**Problems that can be caused by excessive condensation**

Damp caused by excessive condensation can lead to mould growth on walls and furniture, mildew on clothes and other fabrics and the rotting of wooden window frames. Also damp humid conditions provide an environment in which house dust mites can easily multiply. The presence of mould and dust mites can make worse existing respiratory conditions such as asthma and bronchitis.

**First steps against condensation**

As a tenant, you will need to take proper steps to deal with condensation, but meanwhile there are some simple things you should do straight away.

***Dry your windows and windowsills every morning, as well as surfaces in the kitchen or bathroom that have become wet. Wring out the cloth rather than drying it on a radiator.***

***First steps against mould growth:***

***Treat the mould already in your home and then deal with the basic problem of condensation to stop mould reappearing.***

***To kill and remove mould, wipe down or spray walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash that carries a health and safety executive (HSE) ‘approval number’ and ensure that you follow the instructions for its safe use. These fungicidal washes are often available at local supermarkets.***

***Dry-clean mildewed clothes and shampoo carpets. Do not try and remove mould by using a brush or vacuum cleaner.***

***Remember - the only lasting cure for severe mould is to get rid of condensation and damp.***

2. **What causes condensation?**

There are four main contractors that cause condensation:-

1. Too much moisture being produced at home.
2. Not enough ventilation
3. Cold surfaces
4. The temperature of your home.

You need to look at all of these factors to cure condensation problems.

**3. Moisture produced in the house**

**Our everyday activities add extra moisture to the air inside our homes. Even our breathing adds moisture - remember breathing on cold windows and mirrors to fog them up? One person asleep adds half a pint of water to the air overnight and at twice that rate when active during the day.**

**Reduce the potential for condensation by producing less moisture. To give you some idea as to how much extra water this could be in a day, here are a few examples:**

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A bath or shower - 2 Pints

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Washing dishes - 2 pints

Hang your washing outside to dry if it at all possible, or hang in the bathroom with the door closed and a window slightly open or extractor fan on. Don’t be tempted to put it on radiators or in front of a radiant heater.

If you use a tumble dryer, make sure it is vented to the outside or that it is a condensing type.

Always cook with the pan lids on and turn the heat down once the water has boiled. Only use the minimum amount of water for cooking vegetables.

When filling your bath, run the cold water first then add the hot – it will reduce the steam by 90% which leads to condensation.

Don’t use your gas cooker to heat your kitchen as it produces moisture when burning gas. (You might notice your windows misting over).

**4. Ventilation of the home**

Ventilation can help to reduce condensation that has built up overnight by ‘cross-ventilating’ your home – Note; remember to close windows when you go out.

Ventilate your kitchen when cooking, washing up or washing by hand. A window slightly open is as good as one fully open and, if you have one, use your cooker extractor hood or extractor fan.

Keep kitchen and bathroom doors closed to prevent moisture escaping into the rest of the house.

Ventilate your kitchen and bathroom for about 20 minutes after use by opening a small top window. If you have one, use an extractor fan – they are cheap to run and very effective.

Ventilate your bedroom by leaving a window slightly open at night, or use trickle ventilators if fitted (but again remember your security.)

To reduce the risk of mould and mildew on clothes and other stored items, allow air to circulate round them. Never overfill wardrobes and cupboards as it restricts air circulation. If you own the furniture, you can remove “false” wardrobe backs or drill breather holes in them. You can place furniture on blocks to allow air to circulate underneath. Keep a small gap between walls and large pieces of furniture (including beds) and, where possible, place wardrobes and furniture against internal walls. Pull shelves away from the backs of wardrobes and cupboards.

**5. Cold surfaces in your home.**

Condensation forms more easily on cold surfaces in the home for example walls and ceilings

Do not draught proof rooms with a condensation problem, or where there is a heater or cooker that burns gas or solid fuel.

Do not block permanent ventilators or airbricks installed for heating or heating appliances.

Do not draught proof bathroom or kitchen windows.

If you have any reason to believe that your home could benefit from an improvement to its loft or wall insulation, please contact your landlord to enquire about the possibility of such improvement.

**6. The temperature of your home**

Warm air holds more moisture than cooler air which is more likely to deposit droplets of condensation round your home. Air is like a sponge; the warmer it is, the more moisture it will hold. Heating one room to a high level and leaving other rooms cold makes condensation worse in the unheated rooms. That means that it is better to have a medium-to-low level of heat constantly throughout the house.

Keeping the heating on low 24 hours in cold weather will help to control condensation, but keep a check on your meters to check how much it is costing.

If you have a heating system such as under floor electric but are afraid to use it because you’ve been told it is expensive to run, please contact the Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (EEAC) for an advice guide on how to control your system on FREEPHONE 0800 512 012. You might find that it costs less to run than you expect or have experienced in the past.

If you don’t have heating in every room, you could keep the doors of unheated rooms open to allow some heat into them.

If you have a freezer it is a good idea to put it in a space suffering from condensation as the heat from the motor could help to keep condensation at bay.

Be careful not to ‘over-ventilate’ your home when it is cold, as it will cause the temperature inside to drop and make condensation more likely. It will also increase your heating costs.